

Scabies

Information for patients and relatives

This leaflet can be made available in other formats including large print, CD and Braille and in languages other than English, upon request.

This leaflet tells you about scabies

What is scabies?

Scabies is a common, treatable skin infection caused by tiny creatures called mites. It can cause severe itching and a rash that can affect anyone.

The female mites burrow into your skin laying eggs as they go. It takes 10 - 13 days for new mites to hatch from the eggs. The new mites then tunnel up to the skin surface and grow into adults.

There are two types of scabies, both caused by the same mite:

- **common scabies** People affected by this type of scabies will have fewer than 50 mites all over their body and tend to have constant severe itching and a rash.
- **crusted scabies (Norwegian)**. This is a more serious condition and people affected can have millions of mites and a more severe skin reaction. This type of scabies is highly infectious.

Scabies is quite common. Most GP's will see about 2 people with scabies each month.

What are the symptoms?

Scabies can cause:

- **Itching**. The itching is caused by your body's allergic reaction to the mites and their waste. This usually gets worse at night or after a hot bath or shower, possibly because heat makes the mites more active. The itching can affect your whole body and not just where the mites are. The itch can be so bad that it stops you sleeping.
- **rash**. The rash usually appears soon after the itching starts. It can be anywhere on your body but is most often on your abdomen (tummy), hands, in your armpits or the insides of your thighs. The type or rash can vary but it often looks like small red spots.

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- **burrows.** These are a sure sign of scabies but can be hard to see. They show up as thin wiggly white or grey lines on your skin, up to 1cm (½ inch) long. They are usually found between your fingers or in your palms, wrists, elbows, feet, ankles, nipples or genitals (private parts).

Scabies can also lead to other skin problems, for example, eczema or a bacterial (germ) infection.

How do you catch scabies?

People usually get scabies from skin contact with someone who is already infected. Scabies mites cannot jump from person to person, but they can crawl from one person to another when there is skin-to-skin contact for long enough. Holding hands for a while could allow mites to crawl from hand to hand, but just shaking hands might not.

What treatment will I be given?

If it is thought you have scabies you will need treatment. Anyone you might have passed it on to, including everyone in your household, and any sexual contacts (even if they are not itching) will also need to be treated. This is because it can take 2 - 4 weeks for symptoms to appear, so scabies can be caught and passed on without you realising.

Your doctor will prescribe a scabicide (special cream used to treat scabies). This cream must be applied to your skin, all over your body, and should not be washed off for 12 – 24 hours, depending on the type of cream prescribed. It is usually easier if you apply the cream at bed time.

After waiting the correct length of time you should take a bath or shower, dress in clean clothes, change your bed sheets, duvet covers or blankets and wash clothes and bedding as directed later in this leaflet.

A second application of the cream is needed 5 - 7 days later to make sure any eggs that have survived the first application are killed. If you need help to apply the cream let your doctor or nurse know.

What if I am still itchy?

After completing the treatment any itching can take 3 weeks or more to stop. However, if after scabies treatment your itching gets worse or you notice new burrows, the treatment may not have worked.

You should go back to see your GP who will prescribe further treatment, if needed.

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Can I go to work or school?

You should stay off work or school until you have washed off the scabicide cream. If your child has scabies, you should inform his or her school as soon as possible.

What can I do to stop scabies spreading?

Scabies is not usually spread on clothing or bedding. However, with crusted scabies skin scales with mites may spread into the environment.

Clothing and bedding should be washed on a hot washing machine cycle (50°C or above) and dried in a tumble dryer on a hot cycle. Hot ironing can also help. If items cannot be washed in a hot wash they should be sealed in a plastic bag, left for 10 days and then washed according to the instructions on the label.

With crusted scabies vacuuming of chairs, beds and soft furnishings will remove skin scales and reduce the risk of spreading scabies.

Further information is available from:

Your hospital doctor or nurse, GP, practice nurse or pharmacist.

NHS Choices

telephone: 111 (when it is less urgent than 999)

Calls to this number are free from landlines and mobile phones or via the website at www.nhs.uk

Information used in the development of this leaflet

Strong M, Johnstone PW. Interventions for treating scabies. Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews 2007, Issue 3. Art. No.: CD000320. DOI: 10.1002/14651858.CD000320.pub2.
(Re -assessed as up to date August 2010)

United Kingdom national guideline on the management of scabies infestation. London (UK): British Association for Sexual Health and HIV (BASHH); 2008.

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This leaflet has been produced in partnership with patients and carers. All patient leaflets are regularly reviewed, and any suggestions you have as to how it may be improved are extremely valuable. Please write to the Quality Assurance Team, University Hospital of North Tees or email: patientinformation@nth.nhs.uk

Comments, Concerns, Compliments or Complaints

We are continually trying to improve the services we provide.

We want to know what we're doing well or if there's anything which we can improve, that's why the Patient Experience Team is here to help.

Our Patient Experience Team is here to try to resolve your concerns as quickly as possible. If you would like to contact or request a copy of our PET leaflet, please contact:

telephone: 01642 624719
Monday – Friday, 9.00 am – 4.00 pm
Messages can be left on the answering machine and will be picked up throughout the day.

freephone: 0800 092 0084
Mobile: (can use text): 0779 506 1883
Email: patientexperience@nth.nhs.uk

Out of hours if you wish to speak to a senior member of Trust staff, please contact the hospital switchboard who will bleep the appropriate person.

telephone: 01642 617617
24 hours a day, 7 days a week

The Patient Experience Team is available to discuss your concerns in person Monday – Friday, 1.30 pm – 4.30 pm. The office is based on the ground floor at the University Hospital of North Tees.

Data Protection and use of patient information

The Trust has developed a Data Protection Policy in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1988 and the Freedom of Information Act 2000. All of our staff respect this policy and confidentiality is adhered to at all times. If you require further information please contact the Information Governance Team.

telephone: 01642 833551 or email: information.governance@nth.nhs.uk

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